

Furniture in the Falklands

On a recent visit to the Falkland Islands, I came across several items of furniture on Weddell Island, West Falklands which I thought might be of some interest. They are at Weddell House, recently taken over by a firm from London. In cleaning out one of the old barns, the staff found three chairs, a table and a trellis among other things (Figs 1,2,3 and 4). The local story is that the original owner of the island planned to build a new house for his bride and had the furniture shipped from England. Unfortunately

the bride refused to leave her home and the house was never built. The trellis, which has been cut down to use on the current deck of the farmhouse, was apparently intended as part of a grand gateway.

Since the original owner, a Mr Hamilton, is best known for introducing Patagonian foxes in 1926 or 27 (animals that are still being eradicated), I am not sure that the 1894 date on the chairs is the correct date for their shipment to the islands. The Falkland Islands Museum in Stanley does not appear to have any particular furniture collection but might provide a good source of further information. Only two of the three chairs are fully marked with C. Gibbons Wycombe 1894. The third is marked C. G. and not dated but is of exactly the same construction. The table appears to have a false top nailed on around the edges and is not marked as far as I could see.

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Fig. 1

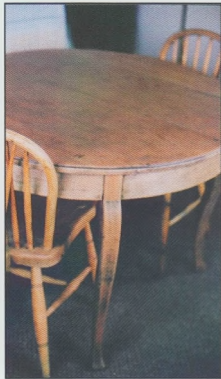


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

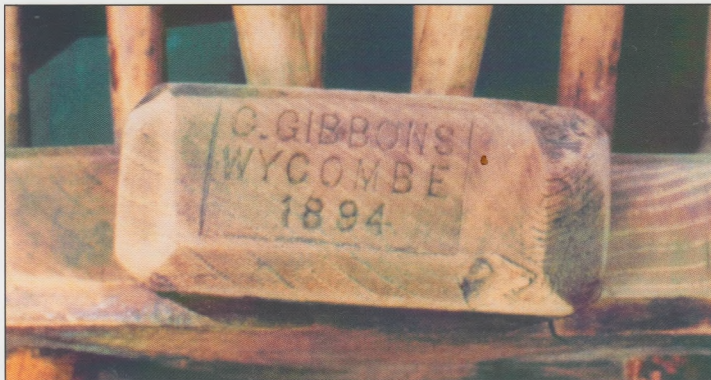


Fig. 4

Bill Cotton has commented:

Quantities of these chairs were made for the War Department by different makers from the second half of the 19th century, and they travelled widely. I have found them everywhere, from Australia to St John's, Newfoundland. Sometimes they had slip-on upholstered covers for the seats and backs. I think the date of 1894 on the Falkland examples is probably correct. I have C. Gibbons first recorded as chair manufacturers in 1883, but Charles Gibbons is recorded as a 21-year-old chair maker in 1841, and the earliest recorded of his dated examples in England (1870) is in the Cotton Collection (Geffrye Museum). An even earlier one was found at the English barracks in St John's, Newfoundland, dated 1860. Several of the Wycombe manufacturers date-stamped their chairs in the late 19th century and into the first quarter of the 20th: this may well have been a condition of trading in the town.